

Dragonshards

Shulassakar: The Feathered Servants

By Keith Baker



The windows were shuttered against the sun, and the room was shrouded in shadow. Daine could barely see the figure in the corner of the library. The tall, slender stranger was wrapped in a cloak, its deep cowl pulled down over her features.

"You have seen the evil lurking in this place." Her voice was a sibilant whisper, low but clear. "Its power increases with every soul it corrupts. I cannot move among the people to find the fiend Kazalak. You must follow the trail of Kazalak's poisoned touch, battle those consumed by the darkness, and find this font of horror. You are human, warm and weak, and you cannot stand against Kazalak alone. Together, perhaps we can stop this ancient evil before it spreads beyond this village."

Daine scowled. "So we corner a demon and hope you'll show up to save the day? That's a plan, all right. Why should I believe you can stop this thing?"

"I cannot defeat Kazalak."

"Oh. Great."

"I am a vessel for the force that will save us all, a force beyond your comprehension."

Dalassa stepped forward and threw back her cloak. Beneath the shadowweave, she wore a robe that seemed to be formed from pure white fire. This flared up to fill the room with light and illuminate a serpent's head covered with a rainbow of brilliant plumage. The feathers rose up around her, seeming to glow with inner fire.

"I am Dalassakash'alyntar, servant of the flame that binds, the light that will not die. Kazalak escaped his bonds but as long as the flame flows within me, he shall fall at my hand."

In the dawn of this world, the first children of Khyber rose from the darkness to dominate the lands of Eberron. For a time it seemed that no force could stand against the horrors of Khyber. It took an alliance between the mighty dragons and the noble couatl to challenge the spawn of Khyber, and this conflict shook the foundations of the world. It was a war beyond mortal understanding, a struggle that is said to have lasted for a million years. Some say the echoes of the war can still be heard in the plane of Shavarath. To break the stalemate, the couatl made the ultimate sacrifice; they combined the souls of their race into a spiritual force, a silver flame that could bind even the greatest of fiends.

The Ruins of Krezent

The couatl were born on the continent of Sarlona. The majority of their ancient ruins lie hidden in the realm of the Inspired. As they fought the fiends, they established outposts across the length of Eberron. The greatest of these was the fortress-citadel of Krezent, located in the heart of what is now the Talenta Plains. The city extends down

into the depths of Khyber, and by the end of the war, terrible forces had been bound in its foundations. A handful of couatl remained to watch over the world but they were too few to guard every seal, so they sought out helpers among the younger races. According to legends, a small group of loyal humans from Sarlona dedicated their lives to the service of the couatl. Over the course of thousands of years, this devotion changed them in body and soul. By the time the Empire of Dhakaan rose to power, the guardians of Krezent were no longer human. They had become shulassakar -- the feathered servants.

Children of the Silver Flame

The people of Krezent are a wondrous sight: humans blended with couatl, with serpentine features and feathers that glow with an inner light. The shulassakar are dedicated servants of the Silver Flame and will give their lives without a moment's thought to combat the forces of darkness.

If these serpent guardians are so noble and wise, why do the halflings fear them? Why do the tribes of the Talenta Plains avoid the ruins of Krezent and whisper tales of the serpentfolk on moonless nights?

The Silver Flame is a force for good but its followers are often blinded by its light, and the shulassakar are no exception. They fight against darkness with ruthless efficiency and will make *any sacrifice necessary* for the greater good, including the lives of innocents. No one can jeopardize the seals of Krezent. The shulassakar seek to repel outsiders peacefully before they venture too deeply into the ruins but those who persist are dealt with swiftly and harshly.

The shulassakar have considerable racial pride. The feathered servants do not believe that any other creature can truly touch the light of the couatl. The Church of the Silver Flame, the Keeper of the Flame -- these are inherently flawed. While they may mean well, they are tampering with forces they do not understand. A shulassakar is more inclined to work with a follower of the Flame than with any other creature but she will still treat the character as an underling or a child. As far as she is concerned, the physical form of the shulassakar is proof of spiritual superiority.

The shulassakar consider their serpentine characteristics to be a blessing and a sign of their bond with the couatl. They believe that a shulassakar goes through cycles of reincarnation and that the three different forms of shulassakar represent this spiritual growth. Thus, when referring to themselves, the shulassakar refer to purebloods as "servants," halfbloods as "flametouched," and abominations as "transcendent."

Fighting the Darkness

The shulassakar devote their energy to guarding Krezent and other couatl ruins scattered across Eberron. They are aware of the rising darkness -- the Lords of Dust that have escaped from their bonds, the Cults of the Dragon Below, the lurking threat of the Dreaming Dark. The shulassakar face these forces directly when possible. A handful of shulassakar bloodsworn (purebloods) have hidden themselves among humanity, watching for signs of the rising darkness. A shulassakar always prefers to solve a problem on its own or to call in a more powerful servant to handle the problem. At the same time, the shulassakar recognize that victory is more important than pride.

A shulassakar may approach adventurers openly, especially if one or more members of the party follow the Silver Flame. Because shulassakar have little respect for the young races, however, it is more likely that one will attempt to manipulate or trick a party into serving its purposes, believing that humans cannot be trusted to do the right thing simply because it is right.

If a character earns the respect of the shulassakar, they can be valuable allies. Aside from the vast knowledge they possess, they have access to treasures from the Age of Dragons and the wisdom of the couatl. It is possible that a shulassakar mystic could teach new spells to a cleric or paladin of the Silver Flame, showing ways to channel the flame that humanity has never discovered. The shulassakar also have a close bond with the remaining couatl, and noble shulassakar may be able to channel one of these celestials. A human who earns the trust of a feathered servant may also earn the favor of its couatl patron, which could allow him to channel the serpent himself!

The Shulassakar and the Yuan-Ti

Physically, the shulassakar are similar to the yuan-ti. There is one major difference between the two races: where the shulassakar have serpentine characteristics, their scales are hidden beneath brilliantly colored feathers. The mightiest of the shulassakar also possess powerful wings. Bloodsworn shulassakar do not have feathers but often possess colorful markings on their skin. These are easily mistaken for tattoos but they are magical in nature and can shift color and shape in response to the mood of the bearer. The extent of these markings varies from shulassakar to shulassakar, and generally they will not prevent the pureblood from disguising itself as human.

Despite their physical similarities, shulassakar and yuan-ti cultures have little in common. The shulassakar claim that the ancestors of the yuan-ti were chosen of the couatl who broke their vows to the flame and who have since slipped into decadence. As a result, the shulassakar despise the yuan-ti. If the yuan-ti shared these legends, they abandoned them long ago, and they have no interest in the shulassakar. Driven from Sarlona by the Inspired, the yuan-ti lurk in the shadows of Xen'drik and the shores of Argonnessen, plotting vengeance against the Lords of Riedra and searching for ways to use the Draconic Prophecy to gain power.

Using the Shulassakar

When dealing with the shulassakar, bear in mind that they are highly intelligent and devoted to the cause of good, but also proud, arrogant, and ruthless. They will give up their own lives for the flame and have no compunctions about sacrificing the lives of humans or other lesser creatures. Shulassakar seek to maintain an aura of serenity at all times; the only emotion they reveal is cold, focused fury against the forces of darkness.

Shulassakar should be treated as yuan-ti, with the following modifications.

- The culture of the shulassakar tends to produce people of lawful good alignment. A shulassakar who turns to evil will be outcast and hunted by the others.
- All transcendent shulassakar (abominations) possess wings and can fly at a speed of 60 ft (good).
- Flametouched shulassakar (halfbloods) who roll 21-40 on the variant table possess wings and can fly at a speed of 60 ft (good). For a winged shulassakar to wear armor, it needs to be specially designed to accommodate the wings.
- All shulassakar are proficient in the use of the longbow and composite longbow, the favored weapons of the Silver Flame.
- All shulassakar receive Knightly Training as a bonus feat, allowing a shulassakar to multiclass as a

paladin without penalty. Bloodsworn shulassakar (purebloods) are generally ranger/paladins. A shulassakar paladin can take the Ranged Smite feat in order to channel their power through their bows.

- The favored class for a bloodsworn shulassakar is ranger. The favored class for flametouched and transcendent shulassakar is cleric. Virtually all shulassakar worship the Silver Flame, and skilled shulassakar may take levels in the Exorcist of the Silver Flame prestige class.

What Do You Know?

Most people have never heard of the shulassakar. The following skill checks indicate what a character may have heard.

Knowledge (dungeoneering) (DC 15) or **bardic knowledge** (DC 15): The character has heard of the yuan-ti, deadly serpentfolk said to live in Xen'drik. He recognizes the shulassakar as being similar to the yuan-ti, but has not heard of the subculture.

Knowledge (geography) (DC 25): The character has heard tales of Krezent, a ruined city inhabited by serpentfolk, but knows nothing of their beliefs or abilities. A character from the Talenta Plains receives a +5 bonus to this check.

Knowledge (religion) (DC 25) or **bardic knowledge** (DC 30): The character has heard specific tales of the shulassakar, a sect of serpent folk who revere the couatl and the Silver Flame. He knows that there are exorcists and paladins among the shulassakar and has a general sense of their abilities. A follower of the Silver Flame receives a +5 bonus to this check.

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the WotC Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and Shadows of the Last War, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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